

THE COMMON CORE STANDARDS

UNDERSTANDING THE STANDARDS AND NWEA'S ROLE

The Common Core Standards aim to bring consistency and rigor to content standards across the country for the first time ever. The standards align a wide range of K-12 education content standards into a single, unified platform. Although this is a national effort, it is not a federal project. Rather, it was led by states through the associations representing governors and chief state school officers.

The Common Core State Standards were publicly released on June 2, 2010. States have been encouraged to adopt these standards with a commitment that the Common Core will constitute a minimum of 85 percent of the state standards in covered content domains. Forty-eight states (all but Alaska and Texas), the District of Columbia and two U.S. Territories have been involved in developing the standards.

Common Core Standards are not federally mandated, and some states may choose not to adopt the standards. For those states that do adopt the standards, the federal government can provide support through a range of tiered incentives, such as providing states with greater flexibility in the use of existing federal funds, supporting a revised state accountability structure, and offering financial support for states to implement the standards.

The intent of the Common Core is to bring greater rigor to standards driving instruction and expectations in all of the adopting states, to focus curriculum and instruction on deeper student understanding of a few critically important areas rather than skimming a multitude of topics, and to provide clearer direction to educators on what American students should know and be able to do as they leave high school for college or career purposes.

The content domains currently covered by the Common Core Standards are as follows:

- Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies & Science
- Common Core State Standards for Mathematics (K-8 section and High School section)
- College and Career Ready (CCR) standards are called out separately within these two content domains.

There will be subsequent efforts to develop Science-only and Social Studies-only standards.

NWEA supports the concept and process that went into the creation of the Common Core Standards. The final standards have been analyzed by the NWEA Academic Services team. We support the good intentions, transparency, and high academic rigor that went into the creation of the standards. Because each state may create their own variation on the standards we do not offer state-by-state endorsements on the use of these standards. And because the standards are not federally mandated, we also respect the rights of individual states who have chosen not to adopt the Common Core Standards.

NWEA was at the table to help develop the Common Core Standards. Members of our Academic Services team presented an analysis of a draft of the proposed standards in person to the three organizations leading and managing the standards development process (the Council of Chief State School Officers, National Governors Association, and Achieve, Inc.).

NWEA will release a new version of MAP during the 2011-12 academic year that aligns to the Common Core Standards. Items in this aligned test will be in the multiple-choice format. We will add new enhanced item types to the Common Core-aligned MAP test in the 2012-13 academic year in order to better measure some of the more complex Common Core Standards.

Standards constitute only one aspect of establishing high academic expectations. The Common Core Standards aim to bring consistency and rigor to content standards across the country for the first time ever. But it takes more than alignment to help put all students on a path to success. Authentic kid-centric learning requires strong curriculum development, teacher preparation and professional development, and an effective accountability system that provides information to help educators improve their efforts and increase student learning. We also advocate for the use of assessments that measure growth, not grade, using a stable scale.

Preparing for the transition is part of partnership. NWEA is prepared to help partners think through the transition from their current standards to the new Common Core Standards. We know that many will want an opportunity to “try out” a common core aligned test before their state officially adopts or aligns to the standards to establish a benchmark, and we are working to make this available. We stand ready to help with the transition by providing consulting and professional development coaching services to ensure a smooth transition.